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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 001690

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [MARR](#) [SCNV](#) [TH](#)  
SUBJECT: THAILAND: WHO NEEDS A COAST GUARD?

REF: BANGKOK 01676 (MARITIME SECURITY)

Classified By: Political Counselor Susan Sutton, reason 1.4 (b) and (d)

#### SUMMARY

1. (C) The lack of a single organization that represents the Coast Guard mission hinders Thailand's ability to safeguard its coastline and collaborate with other countries. Factors impeding the development of a Thai Coast Guard with effective interagency coordination include stove-pipes, "rice bowls" and bureaucratic inertia. Culturally the people are struggling to understand the importance of changing the status-quo to add yet another government agency. Although Thailand has established cooperation with Japan and United States Coast Guards, the absence of a Thai Coast Guard makes coordination inefficient. End Summary.

#### COAST GUARD

2. (C) A Thai Coast Guard has long been regarded as essential in preventing and suppressing terrorism, transnational crimes, piracy, illegal arms trade, human trafficking, abuse of maritime resources and other illegal activities. Recent Thai Scholars studying abroad at the United States National War College produced nine papers on the need for a Thai Coast Guard, according to CAPT Somchai Choksaenguan--instructor at Thai Army War College. While these authors believe in the development of a Thai Coast Guard, they recognize the challenges of competing interest among existing organizations, lack of resources, and difficulty in attracting good recruits.

3. (C) Somnuck Sakavanich--Director of Thailand's Marine Harbor Division--when confronted with exploring how to develop a Thai Coast Guard, rhetorically asks "how are we going to recruit good troops with our existing manpower shortage?" In concept, the authorities think a Thai Coast Guard makes sense but when officers at all levels are asked if they would join the Coast Guard the answer has overwhelmingly been no, according to Somnuck. Recruitment of existing Royal Thai Navy (RTN) and police officers already proved futile when Somnuck solicited interest in the Coast Guard. Their response--"it is not prestigious to be in the Coast Guard." Additionally, the Thais are resistant to

adding another government agency and dealing with change.

MARITIME ENFORCEMENT AND COORDINATION CENTER (MECC)

14. (C) Instead of a Coast Guard, the National Security Council has set up the MECC to oversee the prevention of maritime terrorism. The RTN through the MECC acts as the coordinating organization of the four MECC agencies--Marine Police, Customs Department, Fishery and Agricultural Department and Harbor Department. This organization functions in the aggregate as a Coast Guard but not as a single-structure agency. These agencies have varying responsibilities to engage in maritime activities to a point but are restricted in their authority. Therefore, the ability to execute efficient and effective outcomes are restricted due to stovepipes and the underdeveloped interagency process. Separate organizational budgets and credit-sharing contribute to the inefficiency. To help in the division of labor and focus, the RTN currently divides Thailand into three zones which match the RTN operational control infrastructure of responsibility. Zone One under the responsibility of the First Naval Area Command, located in Sattahip, is in charge of the upper part of the Gulf of Thailand. Zone Two under the responsibility of Second Naval Area Command, located in Songkla Province, is in charge of the lower part of the Gulf of Thailand. Zone Three under the responsibility of Third Naval Area Command, located in Phuket Province, is in charge of the Andaman Sea.

15. (C) Somnuck noted the RTN has the duty to protect the national interest at sea in close conjunction with the five MECC agencies. The RTN has combined its efforts with other

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governmental agencies by means of workshops and scenario exercises for exchange of knowledge to promote working a relationship for future operability, and also to conduct bilateral and multilateral naval exercises with other countries.

16. (C) Looking internationally, the Thai MECC works with the Japanese Coast Guard and United States Coast Guard but lacks the skill-sets to integrate their structures into a Thai architecture. Despite the lack of a sister Coast Guard structure, Thailand is working with Japan to support the International Maritime Objectives (IMO) in an initiative to pair developed countries with undeveloped countries to support state security.

17. (C) COMMENT: The reality of MECC's structure and the divided responsibilities between the RTN, Marine Police, Customs Department, Fishery and Agricultural Department and Harbor Department means that we do not have a clear partner to work with on maritime security. For USG officially to work with Thailand on matters of coastline security, all five agencies need to be engaged collectively to acquire complete and accurate information.

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